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ON LIFE, DEATH AND RADICAL CRITIQUE: A NON-SURVIVAL GUIDE TO THE BRAVE NEW HIGHER EDUCATION FOR THE INTELLECTUALLY PREGNANT

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Abstract

This paper joins the call to arms against the domestication of critique in organisation studies. It argues that we have become too pre-occupied with our professional survival to stand firm against the normalising pressure of the new higher education and its publish-or-perish machinery. We trade away too much radicalism in exchange for legitimacy, which results in widely accepted but toothless forms of critique. The paper draws on two contrasting metaphors of Huxley's *Brave New World* and intellectual pregnancy to illustrate some of the challenges faced by early-career academics entering the world of the Brave New Higher Education as academic 'savages'. It discusses the almost imperceptible socialisation of the savage into the 'rationalised myths' of the brave new world to the point that alternatives become literally unthinkable. The paper suggests that we can fight this slippage and the associated domestication of critique by giving up our obsession with survival and by remembering/envisioning alternative realities, such as that of intellectual pregnancy deriving from the fragile idealism of the savage's doctoral world.

Keywords: radical critique, critical management studies, new higher education, publish-or-perish, early-career academics, intellectual pregnancy, professional survival

Being Radically Critical

‘To be or not to be, that is the question’

Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1, Shakespeare

I think I will always remember quite distinctly the moment that my Doctorate thesis finally ‘came together’. I was writing an empirical chapter and suddenly became very aware of what the whole thing was going to say, what it was fundamentally about. Instead of taking to the streets naked shouting ‘eureka’ Archimedes-style (thankfully my neighbours never knew what they had narrowly avoided), I ran around the house flapping my hands and repeating “s***, s***, s***” at the top of my voice before finally bursting into tears. In my defence, I was at the time pregnant with my first child.

It was 2007, and I had just realised that the field of organisation studies, as I knew – or perhaps imagined – and loved it, was in trouble. The realisation was made worse by the fact that I had already thought myself reasonably attuned to the politics and struggles of the meta-theory of the field. Academically nurtured in the hotbeds of British critical organisational theory that were in my student years the IROB¹ department at Warwick Business School and the OWT² department at Lancaster University Management School, I had thought of myself as a passionate defender of ‘alternative perspectives’ that probed and challenged the orthodox ‘mainstream’. I was so interested in this project of fostering intellectual pluralism, which I saw as one of the key tasks of critical organisational theory, that I had made it the object of my PhD research. In particular, I had focused on the work of editors of leading European academic journals that were explicitly pluralist in their orientations. I had been keen to learn more about how intellectual pluralism and the ‘alternative perspectives’ that co-constituted it were legitimated in the field of organisation studies, as well as

¹ Industrial Relations and Organisational Behaviour

² Organisation, Work and Technology – formerly BINO (Behaviour in Organisations)

more about the role of academic journals and journal editors in this dynamics of knowledge production, consumption and legitimization.

Given this background, I had been prepared to encounter narratives of valiant struggles against what was conservative and orthodox in organisation theory. I certainly had not expected the work of legitimising alternative approaches to be easy. In my interviews with journal editors, I did indeed listen to a number of heroic stories. However, it was striking that such heroic narratives typically described the foundation and early years of the journals and referred to events decades old. In relation to the unfolding events of the journals' present, I instead became confronted with the overriding sense of the deep-seated and rapidly growing impossibility of being radically critical, set against the background of the proliferating and happily thriving benign versions of criticality. Ironically, it was the *legitimation* of critical projects and intellectual pluralism that actually became the Trojan horse of pluralist journals – as Parker and Thomas (2011) suggest, the institutionalisation of the critical agendas and their journals tamed and 'mainstreamed' them. This tendency was exacerbated by the spreading technologies of academic performance measurement associated with the 'new higher education' (NHE) (Jary and Parker 1998), which were at once reshaping the rules of legitimacy construction and making legitimacy construction less avoidable.

So there, glaring at me in my moment of Cassandra-esque clarity were the signs of radically critical organisation studies in tidal retreat. At a time when critical approaches to management were arguably more internationally accepted, respected and institutionalized than ever (with the extensive network of established journals, departments and societies, including the Critical Management Studies division at the Academy of Management), their radical, nonconformist force was being traded away in exchange for survival and recognition through daily, subtle and almost imperceptible concessions to what was accepted and desirable under the conditions of the NHE. What remained on the shore was in danger of becoming too shallow, contained and 'manageable' to have any chance of sweeping away dominant ideologies or established conventions. On a personal

level, this was upsetting because what I had wished to be the glowing dawn of radical organisation theory was in fact its dying dusk. I felt that I had actually missed the heyday of radical thinking that had inspired me into the field. When, following a double maternity break, I returned to academia and took up my first lectureship at the University of Surrey – moving from a hub of critical organisation studies at Lancaster to a much more mainstream and conservative environment – I felt like the field had in my absence completed this move into the post-radical era. I also got my chance to experience first-hand some of the normalising and disciplining pressures that work on a newly constituted academic subject in this post-radical context, as well as some of the difficulties involved in resisting the disciplinary matrix that pushes ‘alternative’ research agendas towards legitimate but toothless forms of criticality.

In this paper, I would like to add my small voice to all the other voices keen on issuing a call to arms against the domestication of critical organisation studies (e.g. Dunne et al. 2008; Grey 2010; Parker and Thomas 2011). The ebb and flow of the history of the field’s geopolitics should support a conviction that such a rebellion is not without a hope. There once was a time, at the beginning of management as an academic field, of a particularly intensive influence of US-centred positivist-functional worldviews reproduced around the world through American international aid and anti-communist programmes in the post-WW2 context (Üsdiken 2010). Yet at the height of its power, the flames of critical theory and of ‘the class of 1968’ (Rivkin and Ryan 1998) were already burning. The aspirational rise of radically alternative – critical, feminist, poststructuralist, postmodernist, post-colonialist – schools of thought and approaches in the 1980s-1990s, led mainly by European scholarship, is the case in point of a relatively effective (albeit in other ways limited) challenge to the field’s core (Üsdiken 2010). Of course, to come back to the paradox of the institutionalisation of the radical, the very same socio-technical arrangements – the business schools, the scholarly societies, the conferences, the journals – that have helped to make the 1980s-1990s critique of the core reasonably successful, have also led to its domestication. Now that we are in the midst of the second wave of the intensified pull from the US, this time mediated by the increasing totalising technologies

of NHE such as research evaluation exercises, journal rankings and citation indices (ibid.), it is time for critical organisation studies to re-radicalise themselves. After all, to use the Yin and Yan analogy, the seed of the alternative is always already embedded in the full strength of its opposite.

In connecting critique and radicalism, I would like to push further Parker and Thomas' (2011) suggestion that distinguishing between political orientations of the different versions of being critical is key to renewing the otherwise mutating identity of critical organisation studies. In particular, a distinction needs to be made between, on the one hand, benign versions of critique – the sort that is fundamental to any 'good and proper' academic endeavour and therefore can coexist happily with pretty much *every* discipline, paradigm and approach, and, on the other hand, radical versions of 'deep' (Eden 2003) critique – the sort that is fundamentally and continually oppositional and destabilising and therefore can *never* coexist happily with *any* discipline, paradigm or approach. Making this distinction would involve going back to the basic difference between normal and revolutionary science (Kuhn 1996), and between sociology of regulation and sociology of radical change (Burrell and Morgan 1979; Burrell 1996).

One of the difficulties that institutionalised critical organisation studies (perhaps especially in their Critical Management Studies manifestation) face is distinguishing themselves from benign, functional critique well-embedded in mainstream management and organisation studies (Parker and Thomas 2011). In my view, this is a symptom of domestication – a sign that in the process of seeking legitimacy we have traded away too much radicalism and moved too far towards the kinds of critiques of management that are functionally useful and therefore universally acceptable. In turn, this indicates that critical organisation studies as a (sub)field and we as individual academics have become too preoccupied with our own survival.

This last point requires further elaboration and emphasis. Parker and Thomas explain the paradox of institutionalising a critical project by coupling institutionalisation with survival (we may think of it as the 'institutionalize or perish' imperative):

“It seems fairly obvious that a critical project must build some sort of structures or technologies if it is to endure and have impacts. However, it also seems evident that its very institutionalization might produce structures which work to reproduce power and not to question it (Douglas 1987)” [and, drawing a parallel between the institutionalisation of academic and religious endeavours:] “Cults and sects that don’t institutionalize don’t survive, but if they do survive, members’ intense commitments to personal and social change also become more moderate” (Parker and Thomas 2011: 423).

I believe there is much danger to the seduction of the rhetoric and practices of survival. There is a subtle but important difference between, on the one hand, recognising that whilst we survive we have a chance to have an impact (although, conversely, we might have a greater impact once we are gone – to continue the religious parallel, we can think of this as the Jesus effect), and, on the other hand, making survival our aim so that we may have a chance to make a difference. The trouble with the latter approach is that it is too easily susceptible to the reversal of means and ends – the almost imperceptible but crucial slippage from survival as a means of changing the world to survival as an end in itself that might come to pass, if we position and sell our agendas properly, through the production and consumption of a ‘critical’ project.

Both in my research of pluralist journals and my personal experience as an early career academic, I have been astonished by the persistence and spread of this kind of slippage. In the work of journal editors, the slippage into the reversal of means and ends would look something like this. First, founding editors would start their journals with the view of providing a public outlet for new, radical approaches, in order to help to legitimise them, yet would soon become preoccupied with the notions of competition and becoming and/or remaining a ‘leading’ journal. Concerned with their journal’s continuing existence (and its ongoing ability to legitimise alternative perspectives), they would become drawn – to lesser or greater extent – into the questions of the effective operation of their part of the publishing machine, relegating pluralism construction to a secondary position.

Eventually, some would become so entangled in the work of maximising citations that they would make the work of being radical and different wait for its never-arriving turn. As a result of this process, survival would move from being a means in the quest to nurture innovative scholarship towards being an end in its own right, whereas the nurturing of alternatives would shift in the opposite direction, losing its centrality and importance.

A similar process of the slippage into the reversal of means and ends would also kick-start for many of us idealistically-minded critical organisational academic 'fledglings' leaving our alternatives-friendly doctoral nests. Upon entering our first academic jobs, we would typically hear that we first needed to 'establish' ourselves – which would effectively translate into scoring specific numbers of publications in specific journals (3/4-rated on the (UK) Association of Business Schools list, high impact factor, and/or on the institution's own journal list) – before we could indulge in anything too radically different. This sentiment that being non-conformist would have to be put on hold as the ultimate reward for being 'good' and obeying the system is not only deeply ironic but also surprisingly effective at shifting professional survival to the forefront of an early-career academic's attention. At the same time, something else – the idealism, the radicalism and the desire to make a difference to the world we inhabit – starts to move to the background as a result.

The point here is that the system shapes and manages our aspirations in such a way that the coveted (less and less so as time goes by) moment of the ultimate payback-radicalism is likely to never arrive. Under the conditions of the NHE, where we are always only as 'good' as our latest research assessment submission, are we ever established enough for a radical step not to threaten us? For many journal editors, the answer is 'no', *despite* the 3/4 ratings, high positions in the SSCI ranking and overflowing manuscripts submissions. For many junior academics, the answer also becomes a 'no' as our professional lives unfold. After all, promotion targets succeed probation targets, the funding game adds to the publication game and expectations increase as careers progress. In addition, many of us face the 'up or out' style of performance management (operated by

maintaining a tiny gap between promotion criteria and business-as-usual performance targets), which cuts out the 'coasting' route and sharpens the urgency of survival. At the end of it all, if one is serious about self-preservation, there are simply no more hours to add to the evenings and weekends already fully occupied by work in order to be frivolously different. Thus being radically critical gets bracketed off in the equation of our daily life and drifts into increasing insignificance and impotency. At the same time, focusing on self-preservation makes us much more 'captured by discourse' of NHE and the associated academic games of research assessment exercises, publishing, journal rankings and citations (Trowler 2001), which makes the possibility of being radical and innovative even more difficult (Giacalone 2009; Macdonald and Kam 2007; Nkomo 2009; Willmott 2011). Thus the vicious circle takes hold and continues.

In summary then, against the backdrop of the NHE pressures continually and effectively working towards convergence in the field and towards the disarmament/domestication of radical approaches, this may be the 'now or never' moment for a concerted effort to re-radicalise ourselves. Such an effort would require a renewed and committed focus on making a difference and the abandonment of the obsession with our own survival. The latter is not an easy thing to do, particularly as in our Western individualistic, hedonistic-consumerist societies we are conditioned to desire as much as possible in return of as little a sacrifice as we can get away with on our part (Marcuse 1964; O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy 2002). So the questions of 'why should we be that bothered about our existence, what is so special about us, why are we so afraid of the end – of the end of our projects, our ideas, our journals, our field, our jobs, our careers – that this fear makes us hold on so tightly to what we have that we screw it all up anyway' are brutally painful ones.

To me, the ideal type of being critical means a committed and passionate engagement in sociology of radical change (Burrell and Morgan 1979). To be critical is to be transformative of what is critiqued, to be radical and revolutionary. Being critical thus requires the ability to transcend the totalising influence of the system, whatever the system may be. It necessitates the ability to

conceive of alternative realities, alternative possibilities, and worldviews crazy and powerful enough to cause structural damage to the comfort of existing institutions when outlandish ideas collide with the established order. Being critical does not necessarily mean being able to survive. Quite the opposite, taken to its logical conclusion, it may require sacrifice and martyrdom. Being critical therefore means to be slightly or perhaps even seriously bonkers. It also requires ongoing courage that has staying power even in the face of a deep and desperate fear of one's own failure and departure. As I see it, being critical is a very tall order indeed.

Imperfectly, tentatively, I have to start somewhere. One of the ancient ways of coping with primitive fear is storytelling, and metaphors are one kind of devices that can help us to think the unthinkable (Chia 1996; Morgan 1986). In the remainder of this paper, I will draw on two contrasting metaphors to critique and challenge the normalising NHE publication machine and its effects on ideas in our field. The first metaphor is Huxley's *Brave New World*, which offers compelling imagery for illustrating what may befall a 'savage' (such as a radically-minded early-career academic) entering the world of the Brave New Higher Education with its tight (post-)Fordist control of the production of publications and its peculiar reality of journal rankings and academic castes. The second metaphor of intellectual pregnancy is derived from the idealistic, messy and uncontrollable world of such an academic 'savage', in which the gestation of ideas takes time, their arrival is unpredictable and fraught with dangers, their ultimate form is unknown and, whatever finally emerges through a process that is both painful and passionate results in 'indecent' feelings of irreversible responsibility and inexplicable love. In the clash between the two metaphors, intellectual pregnancy is posited as a crazy, radical and suicidal alternative to the NHE and its publication hatcheries.

The Brave New Higher Education

'The poet will die, the visionary.'

Virginia Woolf, The Hours

Most academics identifying themselves with critical organisation studies scholarship will be familiar with Aldous Huxley's vision of humanity's future, so a short description will suffice here. Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931) is set in AD 2540 (or 632 After Ford as it is known to Huxley's future generations), mainly in London. Most of the world's population has become part of the peaceful and prosperous World State, in which almost everyone is happy and healthy, retaining youthfulness and beauty their entire lives (limited to around 60 years). The World State has achieved this happiness and prosperity through a near-total control of its subjects' bodies (reproduction control, eugenics and dysgenics) and minds (sleep teaching from early childhood and legalised drugs). The randomness, unpredictability and dangers of human reproduction have been removed by switching to a highly optimised, mechanised and controlled (post)Fordist model of human production. In specialist hatcheries, human beings are mass-manufactured to predetermined specifications of differently ranked functional genetic castes designed to fit specific roles in society. Biologically superior ova and sperm are merged and incubated in ideal laboratory conditions to create the elite castes of Alphas and Betas. The much more numerous members of the inferior castes of Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons are produced through the Bokanovsky process, through which a single (biologically inferior) egg is caused to spawn up to 96 children. Gamma, Delta and Epsilon foetuses are subjected to chemical treatment and alcohol injections in the hatcheries, which causes physical and mental arrested development and limits the resulting children to specific types of circumscribed futures. The majority of adult female population is sterilised, and the few that are not are conditioned to use contraception. From early childhood, people are taught to regard sex as a freely available, recreational activity, with no reproductive or deeply emotive element. Anything to do with natural reproduction – pregnancy, birth, parenthood, families – is considered pornographic and too

obscene to be mentionable in polite conversation. The social control of the World State is nearly perfect, with hypnopeadic education ensuring that citizens grow up content with their allocated socio-economic lot and that they sustain the World State economy through constant consumption. Any unaccounted for social, emotional and spiritual needs are catered for through the use of hallucinogenic state-manufactured drug called soma, which takes its users on side-effects-free 'holidays'.

Huxley presents a radical challenge to this brave new world by introducing into it the problematic figures of John 'The Savage' and his mother Linda. It transpires that the World State, although expansive, is not entirely borderless – pockets of land around the world with less hospitable land are designated as Savage Reservations, where native locals are left to live as they wish. Linda – a Beta from the World State – becomes stranded in one such reservation whilst on holiday and, having mistimed her contraception, falls pregnant and gives birth to John. By the time she is discovered and returned to the World State, John is grown up (and raised on the works of Shakespeare that are banned in his mother's homeland) and she is grown old, toothless and decrepit. John and Linda thus embody everything that is repulsive and despised in the World State – natural uncontrolled conception and birth, parenthood, old age, ill health and ugliness, family ties and 'primitive' emotions such as unbridled grief (expressed by John when Linda succumbs to soma and passes away) and violence (such as when John, disgusted by the values of the World State society, is driven to publically self-flagellate and also whip the woman he loves). Although John's behaviour drives World State citizens to riots and orgies, the impact of the World State on John is greater. Unable and unwilling to adjust to the mould of the brave new world, desperate and lonely, he is ultimately driven to hang himself.

Huxley's dystopia offers profound and evocative imagery for comprehending social control in modern societies, and as such has the potential to act as a powerful catalyst for critical organisational analysis (Jermier 1998). Most immediately, it is a vision of a globalised Fordist society

taken to an extreme, which is symbolised by Henry Ford's messianic status in the World State (the new calendar starts with year zero After Ford – the point of invention of the assembly line; 'Our Ford' is recited in place of 'Our Lord'). The vision of the brave new world thus lends itself easily as both a satire and a dark warning of the direction of the current changes in academic life. Like Huxley's World State, the NHE and its academic performance management machinery, powered by the neo-liberalist governmentality and its trusty companions new managerialism and new public management, are now near-global phenomena. Progressively engulfing country after country, transcending national and political divisions and leaving shrinking pockets of least hospitable territories untouched by their sweeping flow, they are increasingly re-constructing academic work around a neo-Taylorist and neo-Fordist (or post-Fordist) model of production, involving 'massification' and 'bureaucratization' – or 'McDonaldization' of higher education (Dominelli and Hoogvelt 1996; Furedi 2002; Parker and Jary 1995; Ritzer 2002; Shore and Wright 2000, 2001). Through this re-construction, the focus of academic life has shifted dramatically from the Weberian conceptualisation of universities as ivory towers, in which scholars pursue their calling for mythical and ethereal service to knowledge and ideas, to the assembly line imagery with its emphasis on the speedy, effective, regulated and regimented production of tangible, measurable, quantifiable and rateable outputs – such as publications in, ideally, highly-rated and ranked journals (Willmott 2003). We now have our own academic Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons – both in terms of published outputs and of academics who produce them, with the rapid entrenchment of a division between, at the one extreme, of widely-published, highly-cited research elites and, at the other, of 'research inactive' underclasses, increasingly confined to the assembly lines of mass teaching. The neo-liberalist underpinning of the NHE Fordism also translates into 'the iron fist in the velvet glove' World State style of control (Jermier 1998), which drives the values of productivity and performance management through the subtle but highly effective and seductive (Nkomo 2009) rhetoric of excellence, supported by technologies that make up the audit culture (Power 1997; Strathern 2000) of the academic Panopticon (Amit 2000; Shore and Roberts 1995).

As a PhD student at Lancaster, I had only a second-hand familiarity with this brave new world. Like John the Savage, I had been mostly sheltered from its realities in my cocoon of doctoral isolation, reflection and strange visions in the wilderness. Although, like John, I had actively sought to construct a narrative of that world, I had had no full personal experience of it until, by taking up a lectureship, I officially crossed into its territory. Unlike John's pre-constituted ideas of his mother's home, the narrative that I had pre-constructed of the Brave New Higher Education was already a critical one – I had thrown myself into it with consciously iconoclastic intentions. However, I had been unprepared for the key difference between analysing someone else's responses to the demands of the publications factory and the overwhelming, draining and disorienting effects of the daily pain-inducing and seemingly futile clashes with a universe much more totalising than my own ideals. Similarly to John, I had also been unprepared for the temptations of the brave new world – for the daily seduction of opportunities, continually and conveniently presenting themselves, to make life easier or even perhaps rather comfortable by compromising just a little, and then a little bit more. This slippage is so imperceptible – at first, perhaps, learning to remain silent rather than openly opposing a view or a policy, then perhaps rephrasing your writing slightly to make it more relevant to the wider audience, then choosing a slightly higher-ranked journal out of the options available. Before you have a realisation of what is happening, you have come to desire and chase, like John, the very thing that you actually abhor.

In many ways, early career academics entering the Brave New Higher Education through their first jobs are ideally placed to act out their inner John the Savage, but they have to be quick. It takes time for the social conditioning effects of targets, assessment exercises and excellence rhetoric to seep through your savage defences and begin to take a chilling hold of your actions by presenting the world of the publishing-or-perish game as one to which there are no alternatives (Eden 2003). Before this happens, it comes naturally to ask 'indecent' and 'inappropriate' questions, and just as naturally to become infuriated by reactions to those questions. During the first few months in my current job, I was quite an expert at embarrassing my colleagues. For example, there was one of our

Vice-Chancellor's regular all-university staff talks, where he was speaking about the importance of generating citations and high-ranking journal publications. 'Naively', I thought it my duty to raise my hand and point out that citation indices were misleading and journal lists and rankings were damaging, as they were well-known to divert research agendas away from blue sky thinking and reproduce stale orthodoxies in academic fields. 'Given these effects', I asked, 'should we not be collectively resisting journal rankings and citation indices rather than committing ourselves to becoming better at playing the game?' It was not as much the Vice-Chancellor's response that frustrated me (his response boiled down to the expected line of 'yes, we know the game is problematic, but we have to publish or perish nevertheless'), as the reaction of the 2 unknown colleagues sitting a few rows in front of me. As everyone was leaving their seats at the end of the talk, I overheard them discussing my question. 'What's the point of making a fuss about this?' said one of them: 'It's like arguing against the force of gravity'. 'Yeah,' echoed the other: 'it's like saying we don't like the force of gravity – let's resist it'. Needless to say, I came away fuming at this comparison. (If anything, gravity was to be likened to the publishing game as a social construction and not the other way round, as far as I was concerned.) By contrast, two years into the job, I find it much harder to dare ask this sort of questions and, if I do summon the courage and the energy, I am much more expectant to hear a version of the planetary argument ('well, I don't like the fact that the sun rises in the East every morning' is another common refrain).

An important point here is that, however ridiculous the planetary view of rankings may (initially) seem to an NHE savage, its weight is likely to prove too much to bear and its gravity relentlessly drives the savage towards becoming at least in some ways 'civilised'. If the civilising does not occur, the second part of the 'publish or perish' mantra comes into operation. I am unaware of any actual deaths among my fellow radically-minded doctoral fledglings, but I do know of a few cases of professional demise (through both forced dismissal and a 'career suicide') as well as numerous cases of stress-related illness.

The power of the 'publish or perish' imperative lies, of course, in its being an institutionalised self-fulfilling prophecy – we publish or perish because we collectively believe in the grim inescapability and the institutionalised power that defines the reality (Lukes 1974) of the Brave New Higher Education. The savage becomes socialised into its 'rationalized myths' (Meyer and Rowan 1977) and loses the sense of legitimacy of an alternative worldview, with a full normalisation occurring if alternatives become 'literally unthinkable' (Zucker 1983: 5). This is both ironic and unfortunate, as the savage, in his or her untamed and undomesticated state, actually stands as a representation of other possibilities. It follows then that remembering and/or envisaging another world is essential for de-institutionalizing the oppressive necessity of publication hatcheries. In the next section, I turn to one such alternative reality that derives from the fragile idealism of the academic savage – the second metaphor of intellectual pregnancy.

The Savage Reservation of Intellectual Pregnancy

'We are all connected to the world of mothers'

Naomi Stalden, What Mothers Do, Especially When It Looks Like Nothing

For the inhabitants of Huxley's World State, John and Linda are a (fascinating) abomination because of their transgressive connection to 'savage' ways of reproduction and equally 'savage' ways of physical, emotional and spiritual life that flow from those ways of reproduction. At the heart of the transgression is the unplanned, unwanted, illegitimate and almost unthinkable pregnancy, which results in the birth of John, in the physical deterioration and eventual death of his mother and in John's deep love and grief for Linda – all the problematic, uncontrollable, unpredictable and

dangerous things that had been removed from the carefully-controlled, efficiency-oriented and sterile human production and societal engineering of the brave new world.

As an academic savage entering the Brave New Higher Education, I have become disheartened and depressed by its sterilising and debilitating effects on public intellectual life. Like many of my fellow radically-minded fledglings, I had ascribed to the ideal of academia as society's nursery of ideas, in which knowledge was nurtured simply because ideas were loved – whatever they looked like and whether they did or did not have a functional purpose, and in which knowledge emerged through the unpredictable and often slow, messy and dangerous process that we half-jokingly and half-seriously dubbed intellectual pregnancy, labour and birth³. Now I faced a world in which the narrowly-defined functional purpose of ideas was everything, in which the use of academic performance measurement technologies such as journal lists and rankings rendered love of research, teaching and ideas at best redundant and at worst distracting, disruptive and detrimental (Clarke et al. 2012), and in which academic work has shifted to the organised, controlled and optimised conveyor-belt production of carefully targeted, genetically engineered and timed publications mass-manufactured to pre-given specifications. This is a world in which research begins not with a mad, passionate and uncontainable burst of intellectual curiosity, which may be only very partially aware of its own direction and purpose, and which may conceive all sort of monsters, chimeras and misfits, but with a cold-blooded, methodical identification of the requirements of highly-ranked journals and prestigious funding agencies. This is a world that has attempted to remove intellectual conception from the equation – after all, conception may or may not happen, or may take too long to occur. Instead, publications are expected to be manufactured with clockwork regularity, the speed of the assembly line governed by cycles of research evaluation (5 years in the UK), which are further divided into individual annual performance targets. Academic time in general

³ Special thanks go to my former doctoral colleagues at Lancaster for the priceless gift of pub conversations through which the concept of intellectual pregnancy emerged – especially Kathryn Fahy, Terri O'Brien, Olivier Ratle and Sarah Robinson. They may or may not share the sentiments of this paper and should in no way be blamed for any of the failings displayed in it.

is broken down into ridiculously tiny units reminiscent of the original time and motion studies, with each unit having to be individually identified, accounted and budgeted for in order to ensure that its functional value is maximised and that there is no wastage. Crucially, this machine seems to be increasingly running on empty – ‘thinking time’ and even ‘reading time’ are after all uncommon budget categories. So the Brave New Higher Education is manufacturing more and more undernourished, underdeveloped and ‘Bokanovskied’ publications, loved and nurtured by no one and forgotten the moment they fulfil their functional purpose of performance evaluation.

By contrast, we can think of intellectual pregnancy as a prolonged period of gestation needed for conceived ideas to develop into a research paper, chapter or book (or indeed, the focus of a doctoral savage – a thesis)⁴. Intellectual pregnancy is an undesirable or even an indecent condition in the world of the Brave New Higher Education, too often reduced to or dismissed as a simple case of academic constipation. (At least it is unlikely to be confused with the opposing affliction of academic diarrhoea – a rush of thinly diluted, watery publications.) Intellectual pregnancy cannot be rushed and can be controlled only to a limited extent – healthy ideas are carried to full term and trigger their own arrival. Intellectual pregnancy is frustrating to those who require predictability, as what emerges at the end of the process is messy and always a bit of a mystery. Thinking of the propagation of knowledge in terms of intellectual pregnancy opens up all sorts of crazy possibilities, such as questions of the rights of foetal and nascent ideas and parental responsibilities of those who carry them to fruition. It opposes the practices of genetically engineering publications and aborting intellectual projects that do not fit the required specification (such as when book contracts are terminated in order to make time for the production of journal articles) with the mentality of unconditional acceptance and love of ideas however unusual and unexpected they turn out to be. It acknowledges that sometimes this acceptance and love take time to cultivate and develop, and

⁴ Another debt I must acknowledge for the metaphor of intellectual pregnancy is to my children. I was pregnant with my PhD thesis and my son Danny simultaneously – fortunately the submission of the thesis beat the arrival of Danny by 6 days. (I passed my viva when my son was 3 months old.) Danny was very shortly followed by Joanna, who deterred my return to academia and ensured that the world of parenthood was never too far away from my mind.

additional support may be required (for example, in the form of a sympathetic guidance through a nurturing review process). It accepts that the process of the birth of ideas can be a protracted, painful and life-changing experience that follows a long and draining intellectual labour. It points to the roles of editors and reviewers as consultants and midwives, not parents. It also suggests that, whilst labour and birth are important, it is parenthood that lasts a lifetime, involving a lasting moral responsibility, and that, when an idea dies, it has to be mourned through a suitable ritual and an outlet of emotion. Importantly, it also helps to move the focus of attention away from one's own survival and towards the ideals of the love of knowledge and ideas.

As any one particular way of seeing, the metaphor of intellectual pregnancy is limited in as many ways as it is helpful. It is, of course, an organic metaphor, with all the associated issues, not least of which is the naturalisation of academic knowledge and reification of ideas. However, it is precisely because of these weaknesses that it has its strengths as an ironic parallel to the planetary naturalisation of the publication game. In other words, intellectual pregnancy is potentially a physical enough concept to engage with the furniture-knocking type of arguments that liken journal rankings and citation indices to the force of gravity or the rising sun. Additionally, mechanistic and organic imagery have long been used to contrast with and challenge each other (Morgan 1986), and, as an organic metaphor, intellectual pregnancy counterpoises a living element to the machine worldview of the Brave New Higher Education. Although clearly bonkers and a pipe dream – precisely the sort of thing that breaks itself to pieces on the NHE publication shopfloor – it adds life, passion, pain and grief to the equation of academic work. It also leads to the consideration of love as an extremely powerful, radical and selfless force, typically edited out of the modern mechanistic universe together with sex, excrement, death and mess (Burrell 1997). Holding on to a worldview of the academia in which this force has a place and a meaning could be one way of de-institutionalising the rationalised myths of professional survival and self-aggrandisement that imperceptibly lead to the domestication of critique in organisation studies.

For the Love of It: A Non-Survival Guide to the Brave New Higher Education

'Perfect love drives out fear'

1 John 4:18

In this paper I have added my voice to those who believe that critical organisation studies are in danger of becoming meaningless. I have argued that this is happening in part because we care too much about self-preservation and legitimacy and not enough about changing the world. Afraid of losing our place in the brave new world of NHE in which the rules of the publishing game govern the universe like the law of gravity, we gradually trade away radicalism in exchange for prolonged existence and/or a better status. I have suggested that, if we are serious about being radically critical, we must fight our obsession with our survival, which means facing our deepest fears of failure and death.

The call to arms against the domestication of critique in organisation studies is therefore first and foremost a call to arms against ourselves – against our own complacency, self-importance, self-centeredness, comfort and careerism. It is a reminder to keep our eyes peeled to the seductive power (Nkomo 2009) of the institutionalised worldview that becomes totalising once parallel worlds are forgotten. In this paper, I have drawn on the concept of intellectual pregnancy as an ironic alternative reality to the publication hatcheries of the Brave New Higher Education. Yet it is not the metaphor of intellectual pregnancy per se but the remembering and envisioning of the unthinkable – being seriously bonkers – that is a prerequisite to preventing a casual slippage into the comfort of the established and the benign.

Whatever alternative realities we may choose to draw on, we need something stronger than our fears to accept and embrace the possibility of our non-survival. One such incredible force is love – the unconditional, romantic love of research, teaching, knowledge and ideas that still drives many of

us into academia (Clarke et al. 2012). With its rhetorics of excellence, productivity, performance and competitiveness, the Brave New Higher Education makes us forget about this love, which 'is being stretched and to some extent, is in danger of being lost as we are increasingly subjected to loveless instrumental demands inviting pragmatic responses' (ibid: 13). This expulsion of love from the brave new academic world makes it a particularly important ally for those who seek to engage in radical critique. In the world of intellectual pregnancy, it is love that sweeps away the fear of the dangers of the birth of ideas, it is love that transforms their imperfections and transgressions into something to be cherished, and it is love that puts an end to the endless sacrifice of ideas on the NHE altar of legitimacy. Love is what ultimately transforms the fragility of the savage idealism into an unbreakable strength, because, if love of being radically critical – of engaging in sociology of radical change – is the reason for my academic existence and I give it up, then I might as well not be here anyway.

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